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ENVIRONMENTAL GOVERNANCE IN AFRICA

**CO-MANAGEMENT IN THE MAFUNGAUTSI
STATE FOREST AREA OF ZIMBABWE –
WHAT STAKE FOR LOCAL COMMUNITIES?**

by
Everisto Mapedza and Alois Mandondo
October 2002



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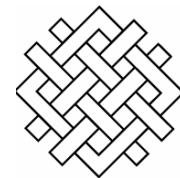
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ABSTRACT

Although governance innovations that involve moving powers closer to the citizens are receiving increasing policy support, their implementation is not without problems. This study uses a review and case study approach to critically examine the contradictions and ambiguities of "peasant empowerment" in a co-management venture between Zimbabwean foresters and peasant communities. The institutional infrastructure for co-management was derived from and superimposed upon a complex web of local power bases, further fragmenting existing networks of interest, affection and association, and thus limiting the scope for co-management. The legislative environment, at least during the pre-2000 period, supported the expropriation and control of the land and resources of peasant communities, thus contradicting the underlying principle of co-management, which is that of equal partnership. Powers over natural resources have remained centralized in the national state; the little power that has been decentralized has been transferred to levels that are not close enough to the citizens. Furthermore, there is no legislation that gives a legal mandate and fiscal autonomy to units closer to the citizens than the district level. The co-management venture is "supply-led" rather than "demand driven", originating in international development assistance circles, and implemented on the terms and conditions of their allies in the state bureaucracies responsible for natural resource management. However, in spite of their marginalization, peasant communities have a wide repertoire of tools, which enable them to significantly penetrate local and national political processes. The study identifies the need for fundamental changes in the co-management system, including the creation of downwardly accountable institutions and experimentation with new co-management relations. It argues that such changes require related reversals in the ways that researchers, policy-makers, civil society organizations and other facilitators have traditionally conducted their business. The central thesis is that the state and other external actors have sought to mold and discipline local institutions in order to achieve top-down conservation objectives.

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ACRONYMS

AGRITEX	Department of Agricultural, Technical and Extension Services
CAMPFIRE	Communal Areas Management Program for Indigenous Resources
CIDA	Canadian International Development Agency
FC	Forestry Commission
FPU	Forest Protection Unit
ORAP	Organization of Rural Associations for Progress
RDC	Rural District Council
RMC	Resource Management Committee
VIDCO	Village Development Committee
WARDCO	Ward Development Committee

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INTRODUCTION

Background

The transfer, through decentralization reforms, of governance powers to units that are closer to the citizens, has been gaining increasing significance for governments in developing countries (Mawhood 1983; Crook and Manor 1998; Ribot 1999). The term decentralization entails a process whereby bundles of “entrustments” – including regulatory and executive powers, responsibility and authority in decision making, institutional infrastructure and assets, and administrative capacity - are transferred to local entities, such as local governments or local communities. Entrustments can be defined as the responsibilities given to lower level structures from above (Ribot 1999, 2001). In practice, decentralization reforms generally turn out to be disjointed and complex processes, having to operate within arenas characterized by the contestation and negotiation of interest between and within various levels of society (*cf.* Moore 1993; Peet and Watts 1996; Tsing 1999).

This study focuses on one particular form of decentralization, namely the co-management of forest resources. It uses review and case study approaches to critically examine the ambiguities and complexities of “peasant empowerment” through co-management of a protected forest in Zimbabwe. The study questions benign-sounding presumptions, often implicit in the design of such projects, that there is an equal partnership between the actors in the co-management arrangement. It argues instead that in real-life situations, the extent of community empowerment through co-management depends on the interaction of interests of the various actors involved in a particular site, including states, international organizations, business enterprises and grassroots actors. The central thesis is that the state and other external actors have sought to mold seemingly local institutions and have tried to discipline these institutions in order to achieve top-down conservation objectives. The study shows that there is little scope for genuine local empowerment in partnerships in which the communities, or committees intended to represent them, are being manipulated. However, it also shows that communities are not docile and that they have their own mechanisms for responding to such manipulation.

Research Sites

The area of study was the Mafungautsi State Forest in the Gokwe South District of Zimbabwe.¹ Gokwe South District came into existence due to the Rural District Councils Act of 1988, which was implemented from July 1993. This Act is known as the “amalgamation” act, because its main aim was to amalgamate the local authorities responsible for “commercial” and “communal” farming areas within each district. However, it also resulted in some changes to district boundaries and in Gokwe District, where there were no large-scale commercial farms, its main impact was the division of the district into two: Gokwe North and Gokwe South.

¹ Mafungautsi is the correct Shona name for a place where there is mist or smoke. Most documents and reports refer to Mafungautsi as Mafungabusi, which is a corrupted version used by the colonial administrators.

The research was conducted in two areas bordering the Mafungautsi Forest, namely Batanai and Chemwiro-Masawi. These areas constitute two of the 15 *resource management committees* (RMCs) formed by Zimbabwe's Forestry Commission (FC) under the co-management arrangement in the Mafungautsi area. They were selected on the FC's advice, on the grounds that they represented one successful RMC (Batanai) and one failure (Chemwiro-Masawi). The research revealed, however, that "success" and "failure" are not useful criterion, since, in the eyes of the FC, "success" is measured not so much in terms of the achievements of the RMC, but by how amenable the RMC is to manipulation by the FC. The RMCs that stand their ground are labeled "failures".

There were, however, other valid reasons for the choice of these RMCs. Batanai is situated in an area that was formerly forestland, and some people within Batanai were evicted forest dwellers. This offered a contrast with Chemwiro-Masawi, where few people used to reside in the forest area. Differences in attitudes towards co-management were assessed in the two areas in the light of their different historical relationship with Mafungautsi Forest. Chemwiro-Masawi was also selected because it had commercial timber extraction, and this provided the opportunity to see how dividends were allocated under the co-management arrangement. Some comparative research was also pursued in other RMCs, particularly Sokwela and Chemusonde. The findings will be cited in the text, but they were minor research sites.

Research Methods

The research was conducted mainly between September 1999 and August 2001. Towards the end of this period, the area began to be affected by the "land invasions" which have characterized much of Zimbabwe in the last few years. These land invasions involved the forceful and illegal occupation of mainly white-owned commercial farms by pro-government war veterans within the framework of the government's "Fast Track Land Resettlement", which is meant to address the nation's racial land imbalances. In some parts of the country, including Mafungautsi, these land invasions were extended to state land, such as forests. Although this research is not on the land invasions *per se*, it looks at how the invasions have impacted on the dynamics of co-management.

Prior to the identification of the case study RMCs, one of the researchers held interviews with most of the traditional and other local leaders in the proximity of Mafungautsi Forest Reserve. These included Chiefs Njelele (now deceased) and Mukoka, Headmen Chirima (now deceased) and Ndhlalambi, kraalheads, councilors, and chairpersons of village development committees (VIDCOs). Interviews were also held with representatives of government agencies (including the Forestry Commission (FC), Grain Marketing Board, Cotton Company of Zimbabwe, and departments such as Agricultural Technical and Extension Services (AGRITEX) and Natural Resources), the Gokwe South Rural District Council, a variety of non-government organizations (including the Organization of Rural Associations for Progress (ORAP), Kana Grazing Scheme, Batanai Burial Society and

Batanai Women² Garden Project) and with RMC members and some villagers. Some interviews were recorded on tape to be transcribed later. The oldest villagers, for example a man known as “vaOne”, proved to be helpful “human archives”. Official minutes of the RMC meetings and archival records were also consulted. The latter were an important source of information on the administrative background of Gokwe South District, from the time it was part of a much larger area known as the Sebungwe Region up to the partition of Gokwe District into Gokwe South and North in July 1993.

Following the selection of the study sites, the first author spent at least two months in each RMC. The same researcher also attended RMC meetings, workshops, development meetings and political party meetings. In instances where meetings were held in the absence of the researcher, research assistants took notes on all the proceedings. The researcher also attended traditional leaders’ court sessions. Since the jurisdictions of these meetings do not correspond exactly with RMC boundaries, in a number of instances meetings outside the research area were also attended, especially those discussing issues pertinent to the research. Key informant interviews were also conducted, segregating groups according to gender and age differences and household profiles were conducted for some households. A total of 240 household questionnaires were administered, comprising 120 in Batanai and 120 in Chemwiro-Masawi.

Structure of the Paper

The rest of the paper is divided into five sections. The next section provides the background to co-management in Mafungautsi Forest. It documents the history of Mafungautsi, describes the role of the RMCs, which were put in place by the FC in order to represent the local community and regulate their conduct, and situates the co-management venture within the context of the complex institutional structure of the area. The RMCs were superimposed upon a multitude of existing social, political and administrative structures that are aligned to, and thus derive their legitimacy from, state or customary institutions. The section questions notions of distinctness and fixity of actors and interests that are often implicit in co-management visions, arguing instead that the overall effect of such superimposition is to further strain the underlying and fluid networks of interest, affection and association, thereby impairing the scope for co-management. An underlying assumption is that people have specific and non-changing interests. Societies are, however, dynamic and any intervention that does not seek to take cognizance of the dynamics of power within a society is unlikely to succeed.

The next section examines the “practical political economy” of co-management in Mafungautsi. It shows how the co-management venture lies at the intersection of social networks, and how the relations of interest and affection within them are in practice negotiated through elections, constitutions, land and resource claims, and varying definitions of concepts such as “resource”, “management” and “sharing”. The study

² All members of this organization are women except the villagehead who is also a member. The organization also acts as a savings and loan society, in which the members lend each other money to buy kitchen utensils; the village head buys utensils for his wife who is a member as well.

argues that co-management is confounded by the conflicting roles of the FC as a player, referee and coach within the ensuing milieu. It also shows that, although these roles are significant in shaping the environment and how peasants interact with it, the grassroots actors have a variety of ways in which they are able to influence social and political processes to achieve their own objectives.

The penultimate section shows that co-management in Mafungautsi is far removed from the democratization of forest management. It is a process where international development and national environmental protection interests are promoted and defended against a backdrop of competing peasant land and resource claims. The section identifies the origins of co-management, tracing its inception to international development assistance circles, and shows how it filtered its way into existence in a top-down fashion through the FC, which is a national government agency located within the ministry responsible for the environment. It also describes the costs and benefits that accrue to the local people from co-management.

The concluding section draws the study together, summarizing the ambiguities and contradictions of the co-management experience. It also suggests solutions to some of the conundrums that Zimbabwe's co-management approach presents, some of which lie beyond the forest sector.

BACKGROUND TO CO-MANAGEMENT IN THE MAFUNGAUTSI STATE FOREST

Origins of Co-Management

Mafungautsi State Forest Reserve is located in west central Zimbabwe (Figure 1). It is one of the 21 state forests falling under the control of the government's Forestry Commission. Covering some 82,100 hectares of forestland, it comprises almost 10% of the nation's 827,200 hectares of indigenous forest reserves, most of which are in the western parts of the country. Mafungautsi was designated a state forest in 1954. Like most such forests, its statutory designation involved the eviction of peasant communities who resided in that area at the time. Its history has, therefore, been characterized by tenurial and other conflicts between official state forest custodians and the surrounding peasant communities. Over the years the boundaries of Mafungautsi have expanded and contracted, reflecting the difficulty that both the FC and the local communities have had in asserting effective and exclusive control over the forest reserve.

The recognition that the conservation of forest reserves in Zimbabwe could only be secured with the support and cooperation of neighboring peasant communities dates back to the 1960s (Phillips *et al.* 1962). Over the years, a number of management systems have sought to involve local communities in resource management, ranging from "community development" in the 1960s (Mutizwa-Mangiza 1985), to "co-management" and "resource sharing" in the early 1990s (Matzke and Mazambani 1993; Matzke 1994)

and, most recently, “adaptive co-management”.³ However, as this case study demonstrates, despite these fashionable, populist-sounding labels, these systems have been structured mainly to achieve conservationist goals, rather than to empower the communities.

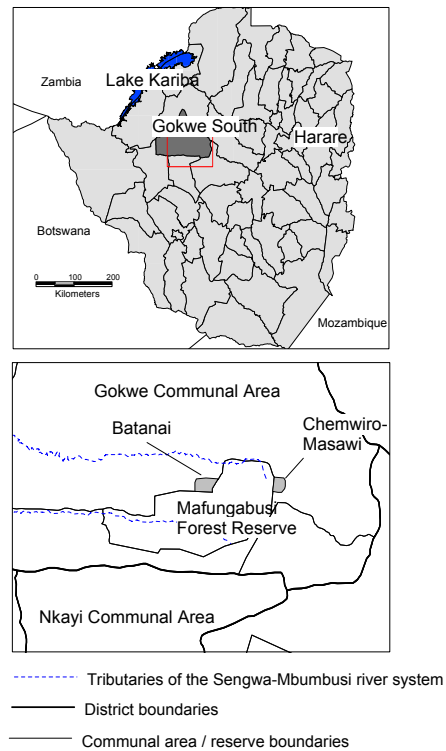


Figure 1: The Location of Mafungautsi State Forest

“Co-management” in Mafaungautsi is an international concept that filtered its way into local practice in a “top-down” manner through the FC. When a Rural Afforestation Program funded by the World Bank ended in the 1980s, the FC, desperately in need of external funding, wrote a new funding proposal. This proposal was initially submitted to the World Bank, but later revised to neatly meet the funding criteria of the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA). CIDA provided funds for local experts to go to India on a study tour to learn from the Indian joint forest management experiences.

³ The Centre for International Forestry Research has commissioned an extended research project on adaptive comanagement in Mafungautsi. Wollenberg (1998) identifies over 20 commonly used terms for local forest management, including “community-based natural resource management”, “joint forest management”, “collaborative management” and “resource sharing”.

Resource Management Committees

Resource management committees (RMCs) were established in Mafungautsi by the FC as an essential part of the co-management package. The study will show, through the case study of Batanai and Chemwiro-Masawi RMCs which follow, that these new institutions introduced new dynamics within the Mafungautsi community. An RMC is typically composed of seven members, namely chairperson, vice chairperson, secretary, treasurer and three committee members, who are supposed to manage the forestry affairs on behalf of their communities. The RMC activities are governed by a constitution and the case study will analyze the processes of formulation, implementation and contestation of the RMC constitutions. Committee members are elected into office through elections in which all adult villagers are eligible to vote.⁴ The election of RMCs is a confusing process in terms of popular participation, as it often does not generate much interest among the potential voters, who do not attach much significance to the elections. This lack of interest could be attributed to the unresponsiveness of the FC to the people's needs. For instance, at a workshop held prior to the 2000 grass-cutting season at Shingai Training Center, the local people requested to be permitted to collect fiber on a sustainable basis for construction purposes. The FC responded by saying that the peasants should buy ropes—the cost of which is beyond the reach of peasant farmers.

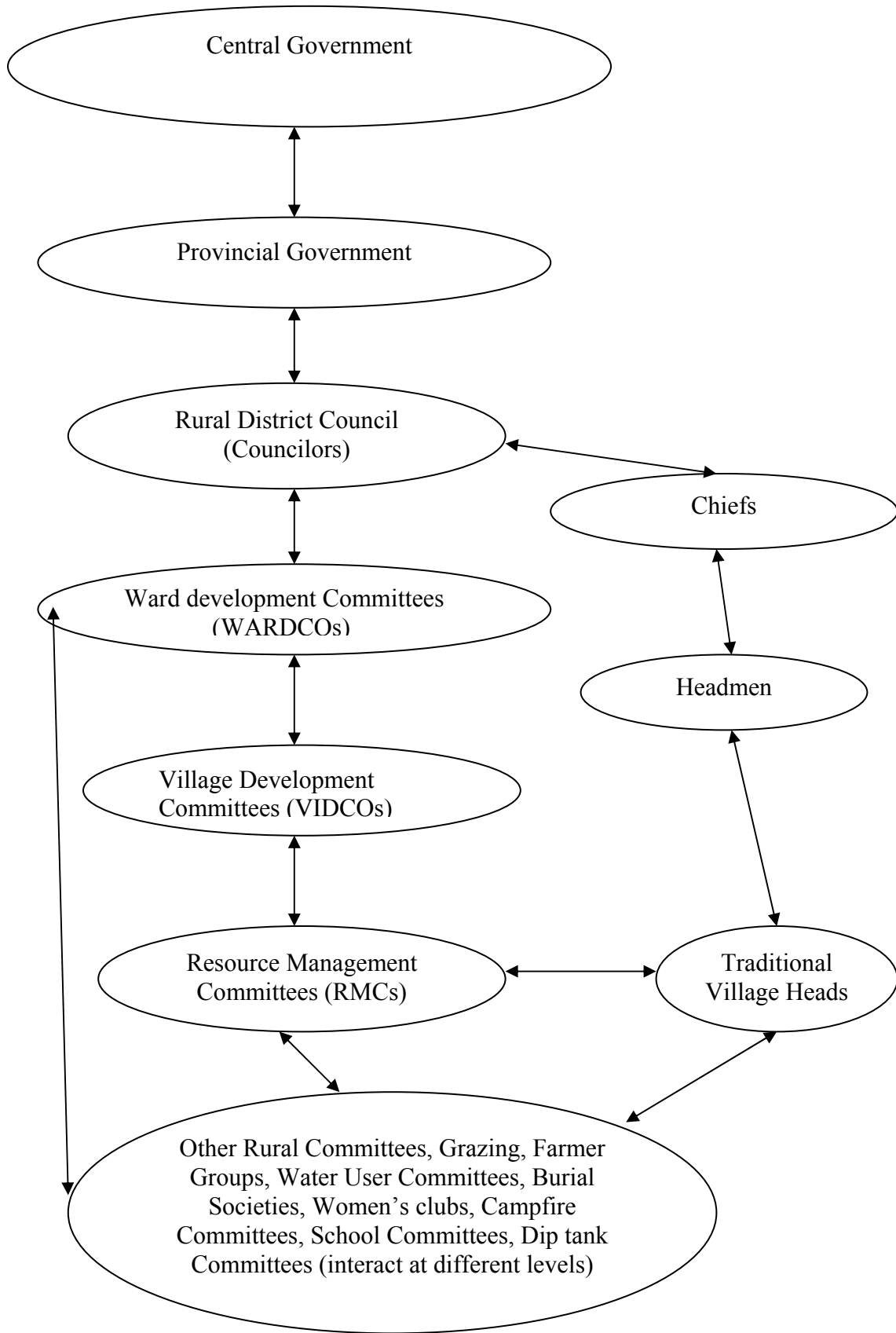
Popular participation is further compromised by the fact that, when it comes to determining who serves as members of the RMC subcommittees, the FC wields advisory powers that are hardly challenged, particularly during the grass-cutting season, which extends from June to October and is the time when community members have access to the forest to collect grass for purposes such as thatching. The case study will show that, although this window of discretion enjoyed by the FC may be well intentioned (for example, to reduce the “transaction costs” of decision-making during a period of high labor demand), its overall effect is to subordinate democratic processes to bureaucratic fiat. The arrangement reinforces a top-down orientation of the committee.

Role of RMCs in the Local Socio-Political Structure

The organizational structures in the study area are, as already indicated, quite complex. The RMCs are only one of many overlapping committees that have been or are being set up by authorities at the sub-district level (see Figure 2). A Prime Minister's Directive of 1984 introduced *village and ward development committees* (VIDCOs and WARDCOs), ostensibly to decentralize and democratize the process of planning for local development.

⁴ Any adult resident within the village, including immigrants, above the age of 18, is entitled to vote. In some instances this “right” can be manipulated to meet specific ends. For instance a 30 year old man was disqualified from standing for councilorship as he was said to belong to the youth in terms of the ZANU PF structures. Immigrants with new ideas and perceived to be ambitious were often referred to as ‘*Mafikizolo*’ meaning recent arrivals. At a meeting to discuss development issues with the national broadcasting agency, the Zimbabwe Broadcasting Corporation (ZBC), the immigrants were accused of trying to usurp power, as they have no understanding of how issues have “traditionally” been resolved in Gokwe South. A close associate of the councilor murmured that that's why they no longer wanted immigrants.

Figure 2: A Simplified Institutional Organogram of Zimbabwe's Rural Local Governance System



They were established over and above the existing traditional institutions. Subsequently, various government and non-government organizations have introduced other committees, such as *ward and village CAMPFIRE committees* (CAMPFIRE is the Communal Areas Management Program for Indigenous Resources), *water user boards* under the Water Act of 1998 and a variety of project-focused committees set up by external development assistance actors and their local colleagues in relation to activities such as gardening, dam construction, soil conservation, water supply, sewing, brick molding and burial societies. Furthermore, at the time of the study the role of traditional leaders was being revamped under the Traditional Leaders Act of 1998, while a draft Environmental Management Bill proposed to introduce *environmental protection area committees*. It should further be noted that the individuals who constitute the RMCs also play roles in other local institutions, thereby adding to the ambiguities and complexity of the whole process.

RMCs in most instances cut across the boundaries of traditional villages or *kraals*. In some cases the RMCs were formed at a level equivalent to the *dunhu*, which is headed by a headman. In Batanai, for example, when the present RMC was established in 1996, it covered three traditional villages. The heads of each of these villages were requested to nominate people for the various posts in the RMC. It should be noted that, at the time when the first RMCs were formed, traditional leaders had not been formally given back their powers through the Traditional Leaders Act of 1998.

The relationship with VIDCOs and WARDCOs is similarly complex. The VIDCOs and WARDCOs are demographically defined administrative units that, in principle, are based on a system of popular representation. A VIDCO consists of six members; four of these are selected through adult village suffrage while the other two posts are allocated to representatives of the ruling party's Women and Youth Leagues. At the time of the study, all VIDCO members were, by default, members of the ruling party and there tended to be a very thin line between these institutions and the party. The VIDCO is presided over by a chairperson elected by the members and its job is to develop a local village development plan. Six such villages constitute a ward, which is administered by a WARDCO. The WARDCO also has six members, constituted on similar lines to the VIDCOs, but it is presided over by an elected councilor, who represents the ward on the Rural District Council (RDC). Although VIDCOs and WARDCOs in principle appear democratic, in practice they are not effectively representative of local interests and aspirations (Murombedzi 1991; Mandondo 2000). Decisions are in effect made at the district level with the technical advice of line ministry technocrats. These experts tend to make plans based on instructions coming from their head-offices in Harare, rather than incorporate the input of the local communities, to whom they are not accountable. In Batanai RMC, the current councilor is not popular as he was accused of stifling development, especially on the issues of building a new school and a cattle-dipping tank. The people were baffled when he was interviewed on the national radio saying that he had managed to successfully develop his ward since his election. In Chemwiro-Masawi the traditional village head said the councilor was not doing enough to convince the RDC that timber revenue had to be ploughed back into the communities. In one instance the

village head attended a Gokwe South RDC meeting himself, in order to push through a request to get proceeds from commercial timber logging.

The introduction of RMCs under the co-management initiative was regarded by the FC as part of the Government's wider decentralization process, of which the VIDCOs and WARDCOs were a critical part.⁵ The committees were originally intended to be subcommittees of the VIDCOs. Confusingly, however, RMCs were sometimes constituted at a higher level, covering an area comprising more than one VIDCO and sometimes a whole ward. For example, the first RMC in Batanai, which was established in 1995, was at ward level and covered four VIDCOs; but in 1996 this was dissolved and four VIDCO-level RMCs were established. Whilst RMCs such as Batanai broke up into smaller units, some of the RMCs coalesced into larger units. These variations in their level of operation have resulted in some form of "crisis of identity" for the RMC. The question of scale with respect to size of units for local natural resource management is important in common property resource debates (McCay and Acheson 1987; Ostrom 1990; Berkes and Farvar 1989; Murphree 1991). Small units are favored because people are assumed to be in everyday contact, which is thought to foster social cohesion, and thus reduce the transaction costs associated with resource use and management.⁶ The evolution, in Mafungautsi, of RMCs across a range of scales is probably a reflection of complexity of local ecological systems and the contestation and negotiation of interest within and across various social groups. Rather than being seen as a problem requiring institutional "packaging", it lends weight to Murphree's (1990) argument that "small" has to be conceptualized with respect to ecological and socio-political constraints.

The VIDCOs and WARDCOs were not created in an institutional vacuum; they were, as already indicated, superimposed on a "traditional"⁷ system of social organization. In this system the household (*musha*), under a patrilineal household head (*samusha*), comprises the smallest social unit. Several households constitute a village (*bhuku*) under the village head (*sabhuku*). Several villages constitute a *dunhu*, presided over by a headman (*sadunhu*), and these in turn constitute chiefdoms (*nyika*) under the chief (*mambo*). Related traditional institutions include spirit mediums, rainmakers and other holders of ritual office (Bourdillon 1991).

The role of RMC chairpersons is difficult because they lack the authority of other local leaders. Even their fellow committee members question their legitimacy. In an interview on 4 November 1999, the Batanai RMC Chairperson, when asked why he was not effectively mobilizing the people, pointed out that he needed to mobilize the RMC itself before moving to the ordinary peasant farmer. Some reminded him that he was not the

⁵ Decentralization of power and responsibilities were cited as one of the principles of comanagement in Mafungautsi (FC 1997)

⁶ Researchers including its early proponents (Ostrom 1990) have empirically and theoretically questioned the proposition that small size units are necessary for common property resource management

⁷ Most of the so-called traditional institutions were remolded to extend colonial rule over the African population through a system of indirect rule. For instance, the term *sabhuku* literally and symbolically means the keeper of the book - i.e. records of taxes extracted from the African population by the colonial governments through these leaders. *Bhuku* is a "Shonalised" English word for book.

villagehead or the headman. “Institutional ranking” exercises⁸ were conducted in both research sites and, for comparative purposes, in another village, called Mutanhaurwa. In Batanai and Mutanhaurwa, traditional leaders consistently ranked higher than RMC members – or, in fact, other leaders, such as the councilor or MP. In Chemwiro-Masawi, RMC members were initially ranked higher than traditional leaders but this position was later reversed. The reasons for this change will emerge later.

One must not, however, over-romanticize the respect given to traditional leaders. Some traditional leaders are even less democratic than the elected committees. In Batanai, a village head was assaulted for handing down a ruling that, according to the defendant, was “biased”. Manipulation of these leaders by government authorities may result in traditional leaders, who are not normally subjected to democratic electoral processes, becoming more autocratic than elected committees. Furthermore, the position of traditional leaders is dynamic and they are constantly faced with new challenges. Village heads in both Batanai and Chemwiro-Masawi lamented the loss of control over their people as a result of challenges from new churches, mainly the Seventh Day Adventist (SDA) church.

The VIDCO-WARDCO and traditional systems of leadership rely on different forms of legitimization, which produces conflict between them. Each has its own regulatory system. VIDCOs and WARDCOs are part of an official regulatory system, which is “top-down” and “rational-legal” in nature and bears little relation to local cultural systems. Traditional regulatory mechanisms include explicit rules as well as implicit norms and taboos, including a moral economy of rules that are written within the hearts of the people. Local censure mechanisms include payment of material fines, admonition and belief in the omnipotence of the spirits and spiritual censure (Matowanyika 1991; Mandondo 1997). An example of the application of traditional judicial systems to natural resource conservation is a judgment made by Headman Ndhlalambi in Batanai on the 29 June 2000, when nine people were each ordered to pay Z\$490⁹ for cutting down fruit trees for various purposes.

The role of the new RMCs is thus not a simple matter of “top-down” “disciplining” for conservation objectives; the new organizations find themselves entangled with both bureaucratic politics (at multiple scales) and local politics (*cf.* Ferguson 1990). The Chemwiro-Masawi pre-grass cutting workshop recommended that the RMCs should be a subcommittee reporting through the village head. In Batanai, however, the councilor, in an interview with one of the researchers on 2 September 2000, argued that the RMCs were not going to succeed as they were hiving themselves off from him as the representative of the RDC by jointly organizing meetings with the FC without notifying

⁸ Institutional ranking is an exercise where people rank institutions operating in their community based on the various criteria such as responsiveness to local needs, feedback mechanism, accountability. This is some form of a proxy voting mechanism as it shows institutions that are positively contributing in a given area.

⁹ Officially, one US dollar is equivalent to 55 Zimbabwe dollars. It is not a market-determined rate, but an artificial rate fixed by the state. On the parallel market the US dollar was trading for as much as 200 against the Zimbabwe dollar at the time of the study.

him. He further argued that a proposed school in Batanai would not materialize, as he would have to fight to assert his power over the traditional headman of the area. The councilor even tried to link the headman to the opposition party so that he would be forced out of office. In one instance a resignation letter, purportedly written by the headman, was sent to the chief. Further investigations showed that the headman's date stamp had been forged. The councilor wanted to take over from the headman following the government's recent introduction of monthly allowances for traditional leaders. He likened Batanai people to the grass bearing the brunt of two elephants fighting (himself and the headman).

In both Batanai and Chemwiro-Masawi there were also conflicts between traditional leaders and VIDCO members. The latter viewed themselves as having positively contributed to the liberation of Zimbabwe from the colonial administration, which resulted in independence in 1980. They labeled traditional leaders as collaborators with the colonial administration. It should, however, be noted that there were also conflicts within VIDCOs in the Gokwe South area. The conflicts were between members of the two parties which fought in the liberation war, namely the Zimbabwe African National Union (Patriotic Front) (ZANU PF), whose members were mainly Shona, and the Zimbabwe African People's Union (ZAPU), composed mainly of Ndebeles.¹⁰

In practice, the two administrative systems - traditional leadership and the VIDCO-WARDCO system - have over the years permeated and contaminated each other, such that practical interaction in everyday social practice reflects a mix of both. The extent of blending varies from time to time and from place to place, depending on preference, precedence and other factors. Representatives of the Gokwe South RDC, interestingly, felt that the institutional multiplicity and confusion was going to be solved through awareness workshops, which would define roles for all the different committees and sub-committees.

Meanwhile, however, the Traditional Leaders Act of 1998 has further confused the situation by introducing a new system of village and ward assemblies. These are composed of a curious mix of elected and nominated leaders and representatives. Membership of the village assembly is open to all adults in the village, but such bodies are presided over by hereditary traditional leaders, whose nominations and appointments are approved by chiefs and the minister - "in accordance with local culture".¹¹ A ward council is composed of village heads of the constituent village assemblies, the ward councilor and a cohort of headmen nominated by chiefs and endorsed by the Minister of Local Government, Public Works and National Housing. The ward assembly is presided over by a headman elected by members of the assembly from among themselves. Village assemblies elect VIDCOs and supervise and approve plans from these VIDCOs, whilst ward assemblies oversee all the roles and activities of their constituent VIDCOs.

¹⁰ ZAPU was the second largest political party in Independent Zimbabwe. It merged with ZANU (PF) through the Unity Accord of 22 December 1987, paving the way for its leader, Dr. Joshua Nkomo, to become the co-Vice President in Zimbabwe.

¹¹ Traditional Leaders Act of 1998.

The new superintendence of headmen and village heads over VIDCOs and WARDCOs elevates the position of traditional leaders in relation to elected representatives, thereby reversing the situation that had existed since the Prime Minister's Directive of 1984. Furthermore, the hierarchical process of approving hereditary nominees (village head, to headman, to chief, to minister) potentially creates a system of patronage, in spite of the provision that such leaders should be appointed "in accordance with local culture". The new allowances for chiefs and headmen, which were introduced in conjunction with the implementation of the Act, are now widely viewed as a patronage mechanism, designed to enable the ruling party to maintain electoral support in the face of stiff competition from the opposition party. Traditional leadership is based on gender, seniority and caste; it is normally conferred upon male elders of certain lineages, in line with the erstwhile "decentralized despotism" administrative model of the colonial period (*cf.* Mamdani 1996, 1999).¹² The introduction of remuneration for both the chief and headmen, and possibly in the future village heads, has set in motion new struggles and dynamics, as evidenced by the conflict between the Batanai councilor and headman noted earlier. This conflict has recently taken a new dimension; the councilor now wants the ward to be split into two, so that he becomes the headman for the other ward, a better paying post than the one of councilor, which relies on allowances and is subject to re-election.

The imposition of village and ward councils upon VIDCO-WARDCO and traditional leadership systems is thus a recipe for further conflict. And the likelihood of conflict is aggravated when foresters seek to enlist local support for conservation through the creation of partnership committees that should potentially be representative of and linked to all these systems. Overlapping, discordant and ever-changing memberships and degrees of interest, affection and association within and between these systems and units further add to the contradictions inherent in the forging of locally legitimate RMCs.

THE PRACTICAL POLITICAL ECONOMY OF CO-MANAGEMENT IN MAFUNGAUTSI

Introduction

The term "practical political economy" is used by Li (1996) to refer to patterns of practical interaction resulting from everyday social practice. According to Tsing (1999), it is an analytical concept that reflects the contestation and negotiation of interest among and between stakeholders (Tsing 1999), while Walker (1995:1) defines it as "how human practices of resource use are shaped by social relations at multiple levels over time". This section considers the practical political economy of co-management in Mafungautsi. The analysis draws mainly from the experiences emerging from the two case study RMCs, namely Batanai and Chemwiro-Masawi.

¹² It is important to note that despite having more support than councilors, traditional leaders are not subjected to the electoral process and this tends to weaken their downward accountability.

Inception, Election and Representativeness of RMCs

The principal research sites, which are Batanai and Chemwiro-Masawi RMCs, show considerable differences with regards to their social geography and political history. The Batanai area was once part of the Mafungautsi forest reserve but it was de-gazetted in 1972 to resettle people who had been evicted from the forest reserve in the 1960s. People displaced as a result of conflicts between ZANU PF and ZAPU during the 1980s (usually known as the “dissident era”)¹³ were also settled in the area. In terms of ethnic composition, the people of Batanai belong mainly to the Shangwe and other Shona ethnic groups, but with a small proportion of Ndebeles. Batanai RMC falls under Ndhilalambi ward, which has a longer border - some 46 kilometers - with the forest reserve than any other ward. Chemwiro-Masawi, on the other hand, has always been a communal area, in which people have been settled for a longer time. The population is mostly Shangwe, and the proportion of Ndebele people in the area is even lower than in Batanai.

Co-management was, as already indicated, introduced into Mafungautsi in a “top-down” manner by the FC, as part of a project funded by the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA). In both Batanai and Chemwiro-Masawi, the inception of the RMCs was at the behest of the FC, who encouraged communities to form RMCs in order to benefit from donor funds earmarked for co-management. CIDA’s funding practices, which required that baseline surveys be conducted before the release of funds for RMC-building activities, influenced the FC’s co-management proposal. In Batanai the original RMC was, as noted earlier, instituted at ward level and it encompassed four VIDCOs, while the RMC in Chemwiro-Masawi included two VIDCOs. Although the inception of RMCs in both areas reflects differences in local organizational complexity, in neither area did the boundaries of the VIDCOs, and thus of the RMCs, coincide with those of other administrative units, notably traditional villages, territories under the control of headmen and chiefdoms.¹⁴ The overall effect of such superimposition has been to fragment local networks of interest, affection and association. A number of RMCs that encompassed more than one VIDCO acknowledged the difficulties that emerge from working with people who are used to doing things in a different way. This seems to weaken the unity of purpose for the people, who normally do not share common boundaries.

RMCs are supposed to be constituted through elections. In practice, however, the democratic nature of the elections is impaired by a variety of factors, including cases of manipulation and subversion by the FC, which oversees and endorses the process. For instance, an interesting medley of parallel inaugural elections occurred in Batanai in 1995. Owing to an administrative confusion (due in part to the fact that the RMC encompassed more than one VIDCO), two elections were held simultaneously: one at Nyaradza Business Center and one at Batanai Business Center. The FC officially endorsed the results of the former rather than the latter, because those elected included

¹³ The fighting ended with the signing of the Unity Accord of 1987.

¹⁴ This is a common phenomenon in Zimbabwe. For example, the Mandivamba Rukuni Land Tenure Report notes that, ‘In Uzumba, Vidco boundaries were neatly penned on maps at the district offices. On the ground and in the minds of local leaders, however, these were secondary to both political and traditional boundaries’ (Rukuni Commission 1994: 216).

more senior people, such as the headmen and councilor¹⁵. This initial RMC was, however, dissolved by the FC after an audit in 1996, and fresh elections were ordered. The subsequent elections entailed an intriguing blend of election and nomination. Three village heads were asked by the FC to nominate seven people. The community's role was relegated to that of choosing who among these seven would assume the posts of chairman, vice-chairman, treasurer, secretary and committee members. Furthermore, the FC simply instructed the traditional leaders to nominate people in their villages without informing those nominated of their roles. This could explain why a number of RMC members in Batanai could not define what their exact roles were. A village head in Batanai said they were told to submit names if they did not want their villages to be “left behind”. The FC commissioned designs, and effectively empowered the village heads to appoint the RMC members, with the peasants being maneuvered to endorse the outcome.

The inaugural RMC in Chemwiro-Masawi was formed through open elections but with the backdrop of a tactful electoral manipulation. Before the election was conducted, the FC limited candidacy to people with the ability to read and write. In addition, people were made to vote through a show of hands instead of through secret ballot, with the FC supervising the process. Voting by show of hands is highly amenable to manipulation, as the communities will be seated in a haphazard manner and can therefore vote more than once, and it can also lead to miscounting.¹⁶ On 5 July 2000, in Chemwiro-Masawi, a vote of no confidence in the RMC was passed through the subtle machinations of a village head, who felt that the RMC elected in 1996 was usurping the powers of traditional leaders. The people elected a new committee. However, the FC nullified the election, dissolved the new committee, and reinstated the 1996 one, purportedly on the grounds that continuity and the retention of a critical mass of trained members was paramount. But the majority of the ordinary people felt that the committee could no longer exercise their mandate. Village heads consulted during the course of the study corroborated the allegation that the RMC had been usurping their powers, as it called for meetings unilaterally without consulting them.

The Chemwiro-Masawi RMC's real or perceived illegitimacy at the local level appears to arise from its strong alignment with agents and symbols that derive their legitimacy from external sources. Thus, instead of being an autonomous unit, the RMC effectively complements the Forest Protection Unit (FPU) in policing and issuing grass and broom permits. Instead of articulating peasants' needs, such as the staking of cultivation and residential rights in the forest reserve, the RMC is seen as an instrument for advancing

¹⁵ Senior people are commonly referred to as “political heavy weights” in Zimbabwe.

¹⁶ At a ZANU PF party election in June 2001, the majority of the voters called for the discarding of voting by show of hands as they suspected that unorthodox means would be employed to rig the elections. The voters had suggested a more transparent system where people would stand behind a candidate of their choice. This would “force” the returning officers to count properly, as the candidate with the longest line of voters would be expected to have the highest number of votes. This was dismissed by the senior returning officer as he claimed to be taking instructions from above—not from the voters. The controversial candidate was declared a winner with a majority of one vote. Dissenting voices were threatened with physical violence.

and supporting FC goals, such as organizing communities to extinguish fires¹⁷ within the forest reserve. In more relaxed and jocular moments, people frequently referred to the forest reserve as the “Commission's forest” or “Mugabe's forest”¹⁸, brushing aside the field researcher's calculated use of the term “their forest” to suggest a truly shared space or property owned jointly by them and the FC. In view of the assistance they rendered to the FPU, members of Chemwiro-Masawi RMC at one stage made overtures to the FC to secure allowances, uniforms and firearms - benefits to which the official forest guards in the FPU are entitled. Though the request was never met, it indicates that RMC members, by design or default, perceive themselves to be in closer proximity to the FC than to the citizens. RMC members also attend training meetings and workshops and are often seen by the public as assuming postures and behavior that make them appear “superior” to ordinary citizens.

The public's perception of RMCs' unjustified pride alienates the committees from their supposed constituencies, thus weakening the relation between them and the rest of the community. The chairman of Chemusonde RMC had many problems with his constituents, including being accused of deliberately destroying financial records, which he alleged were destroyed by fire, and being questioned about why the committee was not holding meetings with the people. In response to the latter, the chairman claimed that he didn't know that they were empowered to hold meetings in the absence of the FC – thereby supporting the point made earlier that some RMC members are unaware of their roles. Under these circumstances simmering animosity occurs. This animosity is, at least in part, due to the fact that the RMCs are upwardly accountable to the sources of their legitimacy – that is, to those that appointed them.

Towards the end of the research, the public's confidence in the RMCs was further eroded by “forest invasions”, which occurred as part of the wave of “land invasions” in the country as a whole and are discussed in more detail in a later section. The secretary of Chemusonde RMC, in an interview on 22 August 2001, revealed that his RMC was no longer functional due to these invasions. RMC activities in his area were now being construed, by those members of the community who had settled in Mafungautsi, as a means of reporting to the FC on the forestland invasions. In Batanai, a peasant farmer interviewed on 21 August 2001 was pessimistic; he said the RMCs were going to die a natural death and would soon be history.

An analysis of the composition of the inaugural RMCs shows that most of the positions were captured by the local political elite at the expense of other social groups. For instance, the positions of chairperson, vice-chairperson and secretary in the first Batanai RMC were filled by the chief's secretary, the chief's assessor and the councilor, respectively. The treasurer of the same RMC was a headman, whilst the ordinary committee members were a district party chairperson, a VIDCO chairman and a VIDCO

¹⁷ In the colonial times, the senior FC officer in Mafungautsi was nicknamed “Dzimamoto”- a Shona name meaning the one who orders people to extinguish fires.

¹⁸ The President of Zimbabwe is Robert Mugabe, who has been in power since independence in 1980.

secretary. Only the position of vice-secretary was filled by an ordinary farmer. The inaugural RMC in Chemwiro-Masawi was also dominated by the local elite.

In both RMCs, virtually all the posts were held by men. The only exception was in Chemwiro-Masawi, where a woman was co-opted onto the RMC after the election at the insistence of the FC.¹⁹ The FC has, over time, become increasingly assertive in implementing CIDA's policy on gender balance in the RMCs. It tried to follow CIDA's "advice" as they were the funding organization. The FC also, as noted earlier, advocated that people should vote for RMC representatives who can read and write. This insistence on the possession of reading and writing skills works against the minority Shangwes, among whom literacy levels are generally lower compared to the other ethnic groups. However, the elected RMCs in both Batanai and Chemwiro-Masawi failed to advance the interests of their communities, despite being able to read and write.

Despite the dominance of the male elite in the composition of the RMCs, the configuration of real and effective power may have little to do with who is a member of the RMC. For instance, a relative of one of the local headmen was found to dominate and hold sway over most decisions made by the Batanai RMC. The community, during subsequent probing, intimated the existence of a hidden sphere of interaction, in which the headman's relative was variously perceived to wield influence through eloquence, charisma or possession of esoteric powers, including witchcraft. People's failure to express their interests or intentions openly also helped to explain some of the networks and associations. For instance, in Chemwiro-Masawi RMC, a group of business people from outside the RMC area conspired with the RMC chairperson to take over a bee-keeping project, without the support of the community as a whole. In an interview, the leader of the business people confirmed their interest and justified the exclusion of the community on the grounds that they did not have the resources to participate effectively. The invisible networks of interest, affection and association may be observed through actions and the unspoken word, or what people do or don't do.

Decision-Making and Fiscal Autonomy

Once RMCs have been elected, they are supposed to formulate and adopt a constitution. In practice, however, the constitutions are not formulated by the local communities. The RMCs are made to adopt a standard draft constitution, formulated by the FC in conjunction with the Ministry of National Affairs and Employment Creation. Adoption of the constitution is a tacit precondition for any community to join the co-management project. The RMCs are supposed to amend the constitution to meet their particular needs before adopting it. In practice, however, they simply adopt it. Failure to amend the constitution may be caused by several factors, not least of which is the low literacy levels among communities in the Gokwe area. According to Central Statistical Office (CSO)

¹⁹ One of the meetings of women we requested the kraalhead to organize for us was challenged by one Batanai villager "What does the kraalhead want to do with our wives". This is not a unique incident as a woman who had been elected as the treasurer for the Masawi School Committee on 14 March 2000 was denied the opportunity by her husband.

records, in 1992 only 39% of people in Gokwe District²⁰ had received formal education (CSO 1992). The constitutions which communities are made to adopt and are expected to amend are written in English. The Chemwiro-Masawi pre-grass cutting workshop of 5 November 2000 demanded the translation of the constitutions into the vernacular language so that people would know their “rights and powers”. But, to date, this has not been done.

Read in isolation, section 24 of the standard RMC constitution appears to be devolving decision-making autonomy to the RMC, including responsibility for “managing the affairs and business of the community and exercising all the powers that are necessary to achieve all the objectives of the community”²¹. In practice, however, this autonomy is conditional; it is circumscribed by section 20 of the same constitution, which gives the FC veto powers over decisions made by the community. Similarly, considered in isolation, section 14 of the constitution vests decision-making authority in the RMC’s general meetings (which are open to all members of the community as well as committee members), including the authority to amend the constitution. In practice, however, the FC is the ultimate authority, since it reserves the right to approve amendments to constitutions and any other decisions made at the general meetings. Thus, powers devolved through some provisions of the constitution are re-centralized via others. This makes co-management unsustainable, since the local people feel that they have been cheated by the FC, which is perpetuating its old management strategy under a new guise. However, it will be shown later that, although appearing to be formally marginalized in decision-making, communities still exert an influence on political processes in Mafangautsi through a variety of mechanisms.

The conditional decision-making authority accorded to RMCs extends to the management of revenues that accrue from thatch and broom-grass permits. Initially, the FC used to bank money on behalf of the RMCs, but RMCs are now allowed to open their own bank accounts. However, this does not give the RMCs fiscal autonomy. The FC is a signatory to the RMC accounts, which gives them leverage in approving the uses of revenues. In Batanai one RMC member, who felt she had been unfairly removed from the RMC, refused to cancel her name as an authorized signatory of the RMC account. The FC, however, used its muscles to have her name removed from the signatory list in her absence. The FC also enjoys audit powers over RMC revenues, and through such powers can dissolve RMCs they consider are not performing adequately.

Over the years, the FC has encouraged the communities to invest their money in environmentally friendly projects, particularly bee keeping, for which it is quite easy to get funding approval. Much of the accruing revenues have thus been invested in the expansion of apiculture, with hives being acquired for the communities through the FC.

²⁰ Census figures available are for the period before the separation of Gokwe into Gokwe North and South in July 1993.

²¹ This sounds rather ambiguosambiguous. This is a result of using constitutions designed for specific projects, which have specific objectives that which do not make much sense when applied to a broader community.

Income from grass permits for the period between 1996 and 1999 was about Z\$23,000 for Chemwiro-Masawi and Z\$10,000 for Batanai, none of which has been invested in enterprises other than apiculture. Chemwiro-Masawi and Batanai RMCs now own 30 and 10 hives respectively, although none of these have yet been commercially exploited. Investment in apiculture, however, is completely at variance with community priorities. In a questionnaire survey of 240 respondents in both Batanai and Chemwiro-Masawi, over 70% of the respondents preferred to invest the money in vegetable growing projects and another 26% variously preferred fruit marketing, carpentry and other minor industries. In contrast, only 4% preferred apiculture, the official favorite. In another RMC, called Sokwela, the community also wanted to invest their money in gardening and poultry projects, but these were not approved by the FC, which advised an investment in apiculture instead. The priorities of communities in the Chemwiro-Masawi area also include non-commercial projects, notably the development of the Masawi primary school and Chemwiro clinic.

“Peasant Weapons” against Co-Management

The FC has powers to enforce comanagement. However, the peasant farmers in both Batanai and Chemwiro-Masawi also have their own forms of power, which they have used to counter those of the FC. This is what Scott (1985) called the “weapons of the weak”. The examples below show how the “powerless” peasants have reacted to co-management. Their methods have ranged from poaching, arson and setting forest fires, to the defying of FC directives on the choice of projects and questioning the contradictory roles of the FC.

The available poaching records are only official figures. They mask the enormity of the poaching problem as the majority of the cases, according to locals, go undetected.²² The poachers who pay fines are few (Vermeulen 1994). In some cases, poachers apprehended by FPU guards are not handed over to the police since such guards have the discretion of warning the poachers, confiscating the tools of their trade or just fining them at the FC level. Suspicions of connivance and bribery between the guards and apprehended poachers were commonplace. Sophisticated poachers were reportedly easily able to evade the guards because they have intimate knowledge of FPU and RMC patrols. The patrols were reputedly more intensive during the grass-cutting season, after which there tended to be significant lulls that poachers could put to good use. Night times were also said to be “safe” for poachers.

Focus group discussions held in both Batanai and Chemwiro-Masawi criticized the use of snares in the Mafungautsi Forest - not because poaching was unacceptable, but because it could possibly result in the loss of domestic livestock. The respondents condemned the method, but not the practice. One village elder in Batanai also questioned the double standards of the government, pointing out that in the early 1950s people were rewarded

²² After gaining the confidence of the people in Mafungautsi, the researcher was informed of how people poach in the area. In one instance, the researcher had lunch with game meat which had been poached in the forest. Some RMC members were not willing to report their fellow villagers to the FC, as it would cost them some benefits to be derived from fellow community members.

by the colonial administrators for killing game as it was perceived as a way of opening up remote areas and helping to eradicate the tsetse fly menace.

The enforcement of RMC regulations at the local level is not without its problems, since disgruntled individuals, if suspected, often resort to arson. For instance, the hut of an RMC member in the Gababe area burnt down in a suspected arson attack, but the culprit was never found. The repertoire of suspected arson attempts includes the intentional starting of fires within the forest reserve. Most of the fires tend to occur after the grass-cutting season, lending weight to the suggestion of some form of conspiracy, since people intentionally start fires after grass harvesting. This would be well timed, it was claimed, to destroy the “tick menace” in the forests and encourage the growth of new grass for cattle grazing. This is probably one means of spiting the FC.

On other occasions, people simply refuse to carry out an order made by the FC. An example relates to the case mentioned earlier of a group of businessmen who tried to establish a bee-keeping project in Chemwiro-Masawi. The consortium of ten business people, with the support of the RMC chairperson, approached the FC’s provincial manager for a piece of land in the RMC area to use for apiculture. A portion of land measuring 4900 square meters was excised and allocated to the group for the establishment of some 1500 beehives. The provincial manager endorsed the agreement on the understanding that it was genuinely a community-backed development, but it so happened that the arrangement by-passed the project coordinator, who oversees the implementation of co-management, because she was away at the time. The project coordinator, who reports to the provincial manager, reversed the agreement, ordering the community to take over the project and to reimburse the business people for the expenditure they had so far incurred. She took this decision because, despite the RMC chairperson’s involvement, most of the businesspeople resided outside Chemwiro-Masawi RMC. The local communities quietly ignored the order; as already indicated, their priorities were to develop Masawi school and Chemwiro clinic rather than establish a bee-keeping project. Meanwhile, it was alleged that the RMC chairperson had been bribed in the deal. The rest of the community felt that the chairperson should be held solely accountable for reimbursement since he alone had been responsible for the penetration and capture of “their” project by the businessmen. This example also demonstrates the fact that co-management is not an arena in which the interests of the state are pitted only against those of the local community. Resource sharing is an arena in which a wide variety of actors - state and non-state, local and non-local – compete.

Interviews with people in the Mafungautsi area showed that they were both aware and highly critical of the ambiguous role of the FC in the co-management arrangement. The fact that the FC is player, referee and coach contradicts its supposed status as an equal partner, thereby bringing into question the whole concept of “co-management”. The assumption that the FC and the participating communities have equal status is also contradicted by the equivocal nature of certain FC activities. The FC’s role in the exploitation of timber in communal areas illustrates this point. Under the provisions of the Communal Lands Forest Produce Act of 1987, RDCs are allowed to award concessions for the commercial extraction of timber from land under their jurisdiction,

provided they have the approval and technical support of the FC. The RDC receives a royalty payment from the concessionaire, based on the amount of timber cut, and the FC receives a supervisory fee. However, under the same Act, peasants are not allowed to utilize timber on their land for commercial purposes. This caused confusion and anger in the Chemwiro-Masawi area, where the RDC had, under the supervision of FC staff, awarded a concession for the extraction of timber from the peasants' fields. In the eyes of the peasants, the FC staff were villains, helping the RDC to sanction illegal extraction of forest products. What annoyed the people even more was that the cutting of timber commenced when crops were growing in the fields. This meant that tractors and lorries were destroying the crops in order to cut the trees.

Co-management in Mafungautsi is, therefore, a case neither of equal partnership between the FC and local communities or of an all-powerful state regime pitted against vulnerable peasants. The situation on the ground suggests a complex picture with many active stakeholders, often with those ostensibly on the fringes of formal systems of power significantly involved in local social and political processes. It also shows that local peasants have evolved various instruments, such as poaching, for asserting resource claims in a protected state forest regime. This suggests the need to broker "win-win" arrangements through co-management.

CO-MANAGEMENT: WHO BENEFITS?

Introduction

The new co-management initiatives have resulted in different alignments of the flow of benefits to people and groups within the societies concerned. New initiatives introduce new dynamics that see certain groups of people benefiting. Co-management aimed to re-shape the political economy in such a way that the local communities would benefit. However, the evidence presented in this section will show that the creation of upwardly accountable RMCs has prevented this from occurring. The benefits to the local communities are limited and, as already indicated in the previous section, accrue mainly to the committee members and their associates.

Role of External Lobbies and Interest Groups

In order to understand who benefits from co-management in Mafungautsi and how and why they benefit, it is necessary to look more closely at the evolution of the co-management initiative and, in particular, at the various lobbies and interest groups involved.²³

The main initiative for the project came from a development lobby represented by the Canadian International Development Agency. CIDA saw it as an opportunity for investing in the development of the institutional infrastructure for co-management

²³ These competing land use lobbies are discussed in considerable detail in Murphree (1990).

between the FC and surrounding peasant communities (Roper and Maramba 2000).²⁴ The agency provided generous funding, through the FC, for the creation of interface institutions to link communities and the FC in the new co-management partnership. A project coordination team seconded to the FC was created to facilitate the setting up of RMCs and to equip such committees with the requisite capacity in terms of leadership, technical and other skills for the effective discharge of their new roles in the venture. Recurrent expenditure, including salaries, allowances and logistical requirements (like vehicles and tractors) of the coordination team and support and agency advisory staff, took up a major proportion of the funding. Related infrastructure developments included the construction of a Resource Sharing Center and accommodation, including houses for members of the Forest Protection Unit (FPU).

The original CIDA proposal had envisaged a diversified co-management initiative, including eco-tourism and wildlife management ventures as well as forestry. Massive funding was thus used to build chalets. However, although completed, the chalets have yet to be utilized. There are several factors that have prevented their use, including the fact that the water is not connected from the new borehole due to sub-standard water tanks, which have fallen down twice before commissioning. The small tourist base, which has been further depleted by the invasion of the forest by communal farmers, is another possible explanation.

The wildlife management part of the proposal readily found support from a wildlife lobby that included the Gokwe South Rural District Council, under which Mafungautsi state forest and its surrounding peasant communities fall. The RDC already held "appropriate authority" status over wildlife resources within its area under the Communal Areas Management Program for Indigenous Resources (CAMPFIRE), and any wildlife-related venture involving peasants would thus enhance the RDC's leverage. However, the wildlife venture never took off because of pressure from a livestock lobby, which included AGRITEX (the national agricultural extension agency) and allied international partners, who view livestock production as a more viable option for the area than wildlife management. One such partner was the European Union, which has, since independence, been a key donor to the Zimbabwean animal health sub-sector, particularly in providing financial and other support for controlling foot and mouth disease. Some of the measures used to control the disease include the erection of game fences to prevent mixing and contamination of cattle by buffaloes, which are reservoirs of the disease. Under the Lome Convention, Zimbabwe has an annual beef quota export obligation to the European Union.

A conservation lobby, which includes the FC, exercises exclusive management control over the state forests by restricting peasant settlement, cultivation and consumptive use of

²⁴ One can only speculate on the actual interests of CIDA, as it might have been a way of driving the Zimbabwean government policy towards the global decentralized forestry management trends (cf. Ferguson 1990). It also provided an employment opportunity for its citizens as advisors and through consultancies.

resources in the forest. Only those activities considered to be environmentally benign have found support from this environmental lobby, and these are thus the only ones that have been included in the co-management set-up. The main activities are grazing and the extraction of thatching grass, which form the core components of the co-management scheme as it has come to operate in Mafungautsi today. The controls over these activities are seen by the FC as a means of achieving environmental protection goals. They are intended to reduce the amount of timber cut for fuel and lessen the damage done by forest or veld fires. The FC also uses its powers over RMC finances to prevent RMCs from utilizing the revenue they obtain from thatching grass on projects which are considered to be environmentally harmful. As already indicated, although such revenue belongs to the RMCs, decisions regarding its disposal are subject to approval by the FC. Such controls may be well-intentioned monitoring and supervisory tools; however, the fact that the FC has authority over a community's use of funds means that the RMCs have no fiscal autonomy, which is an important incentive for the promotion of public participation and partnership.

Peasant Access to Forest Resources

The cutting of grass for thatching and other purposes is, as already indicated, one of the most important components of the co-management scheme. It is administered through a system of RMC controlled permits for areas of the forest reserve allocated by the FC to specific RMCs. Other areas of the forest reserve, particularly vlei²⁵ areas like Lutope, where thatching grass is abundant, are still under FC control with the permits being issued directly by the FC. Those who want the grass can pay for the permits in cash to the appropriate RMC or (in the case of areas like Lutope) the FC. A system of payment using bundles of grass is used for collectors who cannot afford to pay for the grass permits in cash. For every five bundles of grass cut, the user is entitled to three; the remaining two are retained by the RMC or the FC for resale and the revenue accrues to them. Reeds for mats and grass for making brooms can also be extracted from the forest reserve through similar permits; a single permit entitles the user to a day's extraction of the resource with the revenue again accruing to the appropriate RMC or the FC. Collection of dead wood for fuel is only permitted under a stringent system of conditions, including the requirement that extractors be in the company of members of the Forest Protection Unit. Peasants must not be accompanied by dogs and should not carry axes and matches or lighters on fuelwood collection excursions. These are seen as tools of those likely to be involved in nefarious activities, like poaching (for which dogs are used), felling of trees (axes) and extraction of honey (matches and lighters) in the forest reserve. Peasant communities are also allowed to graze their livestock within the forest reserve but the no-dog policy still applies for herders entering the forest.

These sound like neat and rational bureaucratic procedures, but practice in Mafungautsi does not work this way. Peasants are innovative and find ways of circumventing the bureaucracy in order to meet their own needs. Thus, some people in Batanai manipulate the situation, illegally collecting products—including game—from Mafungautsi when the

²⁵ This is a term commonly used within Southern Africa to define a wetland area with grass.

FPU is not in the vicinity. Since the whole circumference of the 82,100 hectare forest cannot be effectively monitored all the time, some villagers also sneak in and out of the forest without paying permit fees. Similarly, peasants tend to hand over smaller bundles of thatching grass to the RMCs and retain the bigger ones. Moreover, the bundles of grass given to the RMCs are not always sold as intended. The cost of transporting and selling the grass at Gokwe Center has meant that no RMC member has been willing to sell brooms or thatching grass away from their villages. The bundles have simply been dumped at the homesteads of the RMC members, in most cases the treasurer or the chairperson. This has resulted in lots of bundles rotting. In Batanai 115 bundles of thatching grass were rotting at the treasurer's homestead in April 2001. The situation was similar at the homestead of the Chemwiro-Masawi RMC chairman, although the exact number could not be counted due to the advanced stage of rotting. Some informants alleged that the RMC members were now using rotting of grass as an excuse for misrepresenting the actual number of bundles sold during auditing, while some RMC members were reported to be using the grass before it even begins to rot.²⁶ These are clear illustrations of how the rationality of co-management does not necessarily coincide with that of the local people, who manipulate the rules to suit their own purposes.

There were various other complaints about RMC members. In Chemusonde RMC some villagers preferred to cut thatching grass at the Lutope vleis administered by the FC rather than in areas controlled by the RMC because they felt that paying the RMC for a permit would be a direct transfer of resources to the RMC members. However, some Chemusonde respondents interviewed at Lutope FPU camp said that they came to Lutope because it has better thatching grass than the area allocated to their RMC. In both Batanai and Chemwiro-Masawi there were unconfirmed incidences of non-payment of permit fees by the RMC members and in Batanai one RMC member was alleged to have harvested broom grass before the official opening of the grass-cutting season, in the pretext of monitoring illegal broom grass collectors. In another instance, the research assistant successfully traced cartwheel tracks from an area where broom grass had been poached to the RMC member's homestead. It was evident from issues raised at the workshop held at Shingai Training Center on 4 November 2000 that some of the villagers had reacted by joining the RMC members in this illegal collection. This workshop recommended the use of incentives to encourage people to assist in the apprehension of rule breakers. A similar arrangement has worked well in the Kana Grazing Scheme in the western parts of Mafungautsi. People in Kana, through their own initiative, set aside some vlei areas within the communal area, for controlled harvesting of thatching grass. They made their own rules and established a committee to manage the vlei. The committee employs what they call "fiber guards". These are community chosen guards who enforce decisions made by the community in their meetings. They are so called because they do not use the conventional handcuffs used by the state police or the FPU. Anyone who grazes livestock in the vlei before the end of the grass cutting period is fined

²⁶ Grass collection now seems to be a lucrative venture, as most RMC members want to use their homes as grass collection centers in order to benefit if the grass "rots". Those whose homes are not designated as collection points do not cooperate fully in the RMC activities.

Z\$15, a third of which goes to the guard who made the arrest. This project was initiated by the local people themselves as a way of securing a supply of thatching grass.²⁷

The emphasis on grazing and thatching grass reflects the fact that the FC favors a partnership that revolves around minor forest products rather than timber or land rights *per se*. However, studies conducted in areas adjacent to forest reserves in Zimbabwe have consistently demonstrated that peasant communities in such areas attach far higher values to the land and construction timber in the protected forest reserve than to minor forest products (Matzke and Mazambani 1993; Matose 1994; Gwaai Working Group 1997). From colonial to present times, state-enforced evictions have not effectively stopped peasants from settling and cultivating in the forest reserve. They have not completely quelled people's quest to be reunited with what they consider to be their land and resource heritage.

In Mafungautsi, several attempts have been made to regain access to the forest. For instance, soon after the Unity Accord of 1987, a peasant delegation from the Ndhlabambi area organized to meet the Minister of Local Government, Public Works and National Housing, whom they lobbied for their return to the forest reserve. Their justification was that they had not supported dissidents and that anyway the war was long over; according to them, this warranted their readmission into the forest reserve. The move was not successful. The Minister explained that the forest reserve legally belonged to the FC, and that peasants could not settle on it since it was a protected area. Recently, some peasants have started illegally constructing their huts in Gondoma vlei and close to the Lutope FPU Camp. This is being carried out in the context of the national land invasions, which are taking place in the commercial farms in Zimbabwe. This is a highly polarized issue and initial warnings by the FC have gone unheeded. The new settlers, who number about 49 households, together with another 131 who are reported to have registered their intention to settle in the forest, have already established local branches of the ruling party.

The above evidence shows that the rhetoric of co-management and resource sharing as paradigms of social empowerment needs to be subjected to critical analysis. Co-management in Mafungautsi was never designed to genuinely empower peasants. Furthermore, peasants will never be empowered in the supply-led context in which power is transferred from the top-down, and international interests and local functionaries define the shape and extent of powers and roles to be assigned to local communities. The international interests, manifested through CIDA, have been pushing their interests through the FC by constantly reminding them of how the project had to “fit” within its terms of reference. The evolving model of co-management in Mafungautsi appears to have missed community concerns. The rural communities are often perceived as sleeping partners. This idiom, however, only holds true as an obvious acknowledgement that natural resource bureaucracies—and the international experts who inform them—are powerful shapers of the environment and how people interact with it. But in practice the

²⁷ No in-depth study was carried out of the grazing scheme at Kana to enable the research to do a comparative analysis since Kana was not one of the main research sites.

exercise of such power is mediated through a variety of other factors, particularly those grounded in contexts in which such power operates.

CONCLUSION

Co-management in Mafungautsi thus appears to have very little to do with the democratization of forest management, in spite of presumptions implying equal partnership, co-ownership, co-use and co-management. The RMCs, which are the institutional vehicle for co-management, were created from a multitude of bodies aligned with state and customary power bases and were superimposed on local structures, creating a complexity that counters the concept of co-ownership through co-management. A legislative environment that entrenches the centralization of natural resource governance while denying the privilege of legal mandate and fiscal autonomy to units closer to the citizens fundamentally contradicts notions of co-ownership and co-use.

Co-management was supply-led. Like most top-down initiatives, it is practiced on the terms and conditions of its authors and their allies, rather than those of the citizens whom it is ostensibly designed to empower. RMCs are external initiatives in terms of their conception, formation, operation and legitimacy. These imposed structures form a new complex and fluid matrix when they interact with the existing power base. Furthermore, their imposition on existing structures confuses relationships at the local level. The accountability of the RMC institution has remained upward to the Forestry Commission in a manner far beyond what is necessary for supervisory purposes. The state seems simply to be sustaining or re-producing itself.

Co-management as an implementation strategy for decentralized natural resources management in Zimbabwe has not been successful for two main reasons; firstly, it has taken a paternalistic approach, and secondly, insignificant powers have been devolved to the local level. The review and case study approach adopted here points to the need to re-evaluate the whole co-management process in Zimbabwe so as to meaningfully decentralize power to the local actors within the forestry sector. There is, therefore, a need to ensure that the RMCs are more demand driven, or at least more downwardly accountable with respect to their conception, formation and legitimization. The potential for doing this is demonstrated by the Kana Grazing Scheme, where the grazing committees were an initiative of the community and the elected committees were downwardly accountable to the electorate. Demand-driven and downwardly inclined approaches stand a greater chance of generating sufficient internal dialogue and debate, which can be the basis on which RMCs become functional. Rather than generating fragmentation, they require the coalescence of complex and dynamic networks of interest and association. This further lends weight to the notion that downwardly accountable institutions are more likely to result in more positive social and environmental outcomes (Ribot 1999).

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